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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 000831

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL CI

SUBJECT: Lagos on Honduras, Chilean elections

CLASSIFIED BY: Paul E. Simons, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Former President Lagos met with the Ambassador on September 4 for a brief tour d'horizon of the regional situation and the Chilean elections.

¶2. (C) On Honduras, Lagos was pessimistic that it would be possible to restore Zelaya to power before the scheduled elections. He saluted the steps taken by the U.S. yesterday, saying that visa revocations were our most valuable tool. That said, Zelaya remains too close to Chavez and his rhetoric continues to frighten the de facto leaders. In Lagos' view, regardless of the current public positions staked out by OAS members, it will be difficult to reject the outcome of the upcoming elections if they command broad public support within Honduras.

¶3. (C) On the Chilean elections, Lagos believes that center right front runner Sebastian Pinera is "Chavez' preferred candidate." Chile will have far less regional influence in a Pinera government, as Chavez will lump Chile together with Colombia as "countries ruling from the right." Lagos believes the race between Pinera and Frei remains wide open, and he will return from a trip to the U.S. in early October to assist the Frei campaign.

¶4. (C) With respect to the region, Lagos' principal worry is Peru. Argentina will muddle through, Brazil will demonstrate policy continuity no matter who is elected, but Peru could go dangerously adrift if Humala prevails in the elections. Lagos is concerned about Venezuelan funding and Morales' rhetoric which together could inflame the large indigenous population in the southern part of Peru. Lagos saluted Garcia's superb economic management but lamented his failure to translate that achievement (like that of his predecessor Toledo) into broader public support.

SIMONS